

EDEE'S ASPEN  
STORIES FROM THE L

A Personal History

by

Edith Light Killey.

1887 - 1980

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*Edith Light Killey's daughter*

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STORIES FROM THE [L]

My father, Frederick Light, was born in northern New York near Lake Champlain. His father was paid \$1,000 to fight in the Civil War for a neighbor. I understand that was often done in those times. With this money his parents bought land in what became Morrisonville N.Y. and built a home there. I visited them in the early 1900's -- my grandmother could go out in the surrounding woods and pick blueberries. I have a patch-work quilt she made for me. It is almost 100 years old but has been worn greatly so it shows its age.

At a young age my father became an apprentice in a carriage shop in New York City. He was ambidextrous and did good work on all of the fancy trimmings.

When gold was discovered in Leadville, Colorado he and three young friends came to Leadville and then crossed over Independence Pass to reach Aspen. There was scarcely a trail, only the one used by the Jack-trains to bring supplies to prospectors. There were many prospectors filing claims to mine for silver, lead and other minerals. In fact, my father had a Jack-train until he began mining. On one trip with the Jack-train, one of the bundles of his clothing fell off the Jack's back and rolled down the steep precipice to the bottom of the pass. He lost the trousers to a Prince Albert suit. The coat is still at the [L] Ranch.

Of the four young boys who came to Colorado from New York together, my father became a rancher, one friend made a fortune in Alaska, another married the daughter of the President of Chile, and the other one was accidentally killed while cleaning his gun.

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My mother, Margaret McClimont, was next to the last in a family of 13. Her mother and father were from Glasgow, Scotland, which is noted for its ship-building. On Sundays, her father would go down to read the paper to the ship builders. He was the learned one. I never knew much about him, but when I was in high school my grandmother had me read the Bible to him. The eldest in my mother's family was the only boy, John by name. He seemed to be head of the family. I remember hearing about him riding one of those bicycles with a big wheel and a small one.

I'm not familiar with how and when they came to Aspen but I have an autograph album of my mother's and it has names of people in Kirwin, Kansas, Leadville, and Aspen who were her pupils -- some of them as old as she was. I remember a name in Aspen, Addie Warren Rucker, who was a lawyer in my time. The album was given to her in 1881 in Kirwin, Kansas.

My mother and her dear friend, Mary Maroney, were two of Aspen's beautiful young ladies, good ice skaters and dancers. My mother had met my father in Aspen and in Leadville, too. One day she and her sister were out walking in Leadville and they met my Dad. My mother asked, "What are you doing here, Fred?" He answered, "I came to marry you."

They were married in 1884 and were staying in the Hotel in Aspen, near where the hay, produce and supplies were kept. One morning my mother noticed a man crawling out of a stack of hay where he had slept. He was Jerry Nedo, a Canadian who became a part of our family as long as my mother lived. He helped her with all of the children, cut the wood for the stoves, and helped with the haying and irrigating.

If Jerry had not done such a good job cutting wood for the stoves, my mother might have done what a friend's mother did in Northern California. The men were told to cut wood for the house several times but they were

too busy with other things to do it. One day when they came in for dinner the table was set with a roast ready for the oven, potatoes peeled, corn on the cob prepared for cooking, also rolls and a pie ready to cook. In the center of the table was an axe. 'Nuff said.

I taught Jerry to write his name. He was very deaf but he could hear well when we got a telephone. Really he was the only real help my mother had. When my mother passed on he started to walk away from the ranch. My Dad asked if he wanted to go back to Canada and he said he did. My father took him to Denver and put him on the train. We heard once from him in Canada. He wanted to know if my father had remarried.

While my father was still mining he used to walk down from Aspen to what we call Hay Park. Natural timothy hay grew there and with a scythe he would cut the hay and bale it in a baler that he made out of wood without a nail in it. He had Jacks to carry the hay to Aspen. The last trip I had to the ranch, about six years ago, my brother Leo took me in a Jeep all over that upper country. I saw a piece of wood from the baler.

My father finally built a good log cabin near the Hay Park on land he homesteaded near the head of Sopris Creek. It was near a lovely spring which never froze over in the winter. It was surrounded by quaking aspen trees. One morning my mother saw a little fawn with its mother come down for a drink.

My sister Effie and I were born in that cabin. It was a good cabin, but one day we had a fire. My father had sold a mining claim and bought wheat for planting, which was stacked in sacks in the attic, apparently too near the small tin stove pipes. Before my parents could save anything but Effie and myself, the whole place was in a blaze.

Our second cabin was not so high up in the mountains. It was built on a homestead too. My mother's youngest sister had a homestead joining it, which my Dad bought from her so that she could go to the New England Conservatory of Music. She graduated and she and my grandmother lived in Aspen where she taught music. My grandmother was responsible for bringing the older three children into the world.

We made another move. My Dad bought what we call the L (Box Ell). That was our brand. He tore down the log cabin and built the first frame house in the valley. It has five bedrooms upstairs, a very large living room and just as large a dining room, and a large kitchen -- with bathroom and a den. It is a beautiful home yet. It was built in 1894 when my father was a member of the House of Representatives. A large porch has been added on the north side to protect us from the cold.

I can never remember when we got our Upright Fisher piano. I know we had it before there were any good roads and it is very, very heavy. It is in the home of my Dad's great-granddaughter who has two young children. The older boy is taking music lessons.

When we first built the L we used to trade at Emma where the Colorado Midland RR made a stop. My father built the road (1895) with pick and shovel for \$200. I learned that from my brother Leo. The store at Emma was a large brick general merchandise store carrying everything from thread to sewing machines and rakes, etc.

Effie and I had a horse we called Old Roany. She had been a race horse but one of her legs was injured and swollen. My father bought us the fanciest side saddle I've ever seen. Effie rode in front and put one leg over the horns and there was room back of her for me. Roany was the smoothest pacer we ever had. We had a large cart and we hitched Roany to

that and went down the Emma Road to shop. A thunderstorm made us decide to go back home. The road was so narrow we could not turn around, so we unhitched Roany and took her away from the the cart. I held her and Effie turned the cart around. We hitched up and headed for home.

Effie always got the hardest job to do or the worst horse to ride. When we were much younger we had three Jacks. Leo got the best one, Scotty, the biggest and fastest; I got the second best, Jim; and Effie, the largest of the three of us, got Old Neg. Her feet would almost touch the ground when she was on his back.

This was the time, too, that we had stick-horses made from scrub oak. The only time we wanted to brand them [L] was when my sweet mother had a copper-bottomed boiler on the stove for washing. We had a Home Comfort Range -- not large but the wood made a good fire to heat the water and we heated our wire brands -- and I never remember my mother telling us to get out of the way.

In a book telling about the actions of the House of Representatives, I noticed that my father was called the The Honorable Fred Light, the only title any one in the family ever received. One trip he took to Denver to attend a meeting, he found that the meeting was postponed because of the weather. He decided then to just keep on going back to New York to visit his mother. She hadn't heard from him for 20 years so she thought he might have died. In the living room of his home in New York my Dad noticed a tall young boy and he asked who he was. It was his own brother who had been born after Papa left home. This was before we had telephones. When Papa started back to Colorado, he decided to take his young brother with him. We were surprized and glad at the ranch to meet Uncle Bill and to hear about the trip to New York.

It was about this time that Leo became the proud possessor of a pair of chaps (chaparajos -- Spanish). He was so excited about them that he took them to bed with him.

Before we started going to the country school my mother had a tutor come from Denver. It was when the Froebel German system of Kindergarten was so popular. My mother and dad had invested in all of the circles, squares, blocks, etc., that were used in the kindergarten. I've forgotten the teacher's name, but she spent several months with us. When the younger boys became tired they would hide out in the field of wheat right next to the fence around the yard.

In the spring, that same wheat field would have the meadow larks nests built on the ground just as soon as the wheat began to grow. I can almost hear them singing now. They are the Colorado state bird.

From the front porch of the house we can see Capitol Peak and from the kitchen window we can see Mt. Sopris. My father had water rights on Sopris Creek and Capitol Creek and had built the Green Meadow Ditch to bring water from Capitol Creek around the mountain to irrigate the upper part of the ranch which included the George Light Forty, the Fealy Forty, and the Lower Dutch Henry Forty. There were more acres that were nameless. Papa's brother George sold his Forty to Papa and went to Alaska where he spent the rest of his life. The Green Meadow Ditch had to be repaired every year after the snows melted. The snow was heavy enough to break the sides. We finally built a wooden flume around that danger area.

Sopris Creek irrigated the lower part of the L and supplied water for the house. They have a new well and pump now in the front of the yard -- everything is underground. I can't explain this very well because I've been away from it so long.

We established a home in Aspen before we were ready for high school. I remember my 8th grade teacher. He was Grant Ruland who afterward became my first principal and later president of Gunnison College. (My dad was a member of the Colorado House of Representatives when the land was obtained for the college.) The teachers we had were most of them just high school graduates but they really did a good job teaching grades first through seventh. The older ones always helped with younger ones.

The high school that Effie and I attended had been the elegant home of the only millionaire the Aspen mines produced -- D.R.C. Brown. It was a magnificent home with winding stair-ways and beveled windows. We used the attic for school and parties and Physical Education classes. I can't describe the glory of it, as it seemed to me. We were in the first class that graduated in 1900. Sixty-four had entered and only 14 graduated.

That gorgeous building has been torn down and a very modern one-story high school took its place. The brick was used for a church in Glenwood Springs. The new high school lacks the elegance and historical background that the D.R.C. Brown mansion had.

One night, just at supper time at the ranch, my mother noticed a small fire not spreading. We were curious. Next day a convict came. He was hungry and Mama fed him. He had been roasting a potato. Many men who were in prison in Salida worked on the roads. He may have been one.

We hired many men, especially during summer when there was so much irrigating to do and later haying. One summer a man about the size and age of my dad came and asked for work. He told Papa that when he was young he and his brother were playing with a gun and it accidentally killed the brother. Apparently that weighed on his mind. He acted strangely and babbled at times rather than talked. Papa decided to take him to Aspen

to see a doctor. My mother surely was worried when my dad drove off in a wagon and no one else was around. The end of that trip was that he was pronounced insane and he was sent to Pueblo (Mental Hospital).

The Upper 40 was the best alfalfa field on the ranch. One day our boys saw surveyors up there. I didn't know we had a gun and bullets but my dad got one out, walked up to the 40, shot the surveyors instruments to pieces, and walked home. Not a word was spoken. That land had been surveyed legally, they were trespassers. Talking about alfalfa -- would you believe I could be taking alfalfa vitamins?

One of the school teachers at the country school we attended when we were small drove up to the same 40. She had an umbrella up. It frightened the team of horses that I was raking with and they took off. I couldn't stop them until we came to a fence -- no damage done.

Effie and I were good on the Go Devils -- a machine that had teeth in the front, a horse on each side, a seat back in the middle, and one rein from each horse. The Go Devils was used to gather the hay that was in the windrows. The wheels in the back had goose necks so that they could turn any direction. One day my dad told Effie and me that we didn't need to come out, because he had hired two men. They lasted till noon (they didn't know a thing about horses), so Papa fired them and told Effie and me to get our overalls on.

Babe often led the stacker horse even when she was quite small. One day the stacker horse went too far and the hay, instead of landing on the stack, went on the ground. Some repairs had to be made on the stacker. Papa told Babe she could go home. When she got to the house she told Effie, "Papa has fired me." Well, next day she had the same old job.

The boys, Leo, Fred Jr., known as Fritz, and Raymond, had many fine

horses. My father had bought two carloads of horses in Oregon and we put them to pasture on the Fred Light Hill. Besides these, we bought many good, sure-footed cow ponies. One we called Gungadeen always put on a good act bucking and putting his head down on the ground and squeaking. He never bucked any one off. Then there was Snake, a tall, lean dappled gray who could jump the fence or the gate between two fields. Leo often rode Nig, a small black good cow pony. In Carbondale, every time they saw Nig hitched to a post his friends would say, "Leo Light is in town." Leo's favorite, however, was Dooley, his beautiful sorrel. He lasted the longest at top speed and was the most sure-footed in riding the range. When his legs gave way my brother pensioned him -- put him out to pasture. There he had the best care a man who loved him could give him.

One time in the spring of the year my dad sold a lovely gray team to a man who shipped them to his home in the Midwest. We hated to see them go. One day that fall my father was up lighting the kitchen fire and he looked out the window facing the barn. He yelled, "Kids, come down here right now!" There were the two gray horses with their heads over the yard fence. My father said he'd never sell a good team like that again.

We had many home rodeos out in the space back of the barns. The boys and their friends could put on a real show, calf roping and all the things that were done at real rodeos.

Leo played the harmonica.. We called it a mouth harp. He could play a waltz and dance at the same time. We were almost raised on square dances and he did a good job of calling them. We danced, the whole family, even Babe who was only 8 years old, at the Grange Building at Watson. Besides the dance hall, there was a place to make coffee and fix food and a place where the young ones could sleep. One night after a dance in

Carbondale we got a good look at Haley's Comet on the way home.

One winter night we danced until well after midnight. When we hitched the horses to the sleigh to go home, Old Kate refused to budge. Leo found a couple of stones (not too small) and put them in her ears. She was so busy shaking her head trying to get rid of the stones that we went in high gear.

In winter before we had a furnace, my father would put a big piece of a log in the stove in the dining room and one smaller and a bit green too, so that the fire lasted all night and the room was cozy and warm when we came in from dances.

On Christmas Day my dad would pile us all into a sled large enough to haul hay to feed the cattle and covered with blankets and coats we would take all of our noise makers around to the few neighbors we had. That left my mother alone to get the dinner but Effie and I grew up fast and were able to be a great help.

Winter was the time when new horses were broken to work by hitching together an old faithful mare and one greenhorn. Away they would go over the hard hard snow which was deep enough to cover the fences. There doesn't seem to be so much snow now.

For years we used kerosene lamps for night work. We had one for every room in the house and the lamp globes had to be washed every morning, the wicks trimmed, and the new supply of kerosene given where needed. Then we had our own Delco system for lighting, and later Rural Electrification made things much easier and brighter. In fact, now my nephew who has a home just above the L has electricity for all heating, cooking and real lights.

My father became involved with the Forest Reserve when they wanted

ranchers to pay a fee for grazing on the hills. We had over 500 head pastured during the summer. That was when my dad had what was called the Fred Light Test Case to see if the pastures could still be free. He lost.

Papa was a dollar a year man and Price Sloss, a neighbor who also had cattle, asked me if I had ever heard my dad at a cattle convention. He said he was as good as William Jennings Bryan. He could sway an audience no matter how large. He was a self-taught man.

My father started shipping to the Denver Live Stock Co. around 1900. We raised Hereford (White Faces) which are a dual purpose cow -- good for milk and good for meat. When he retired, Leo continued shipping to them and now his son is following in their footsteps.

My father also bought cattle from neighbors who didn't have enough for a carload.

Because of the good quality of range-fed cattle, the Lights have the choice selling corrals at the stock yards. For years the same men came early from the Mideastern states to get first chance at them to feed for the market or for agricultural colleges.

At first we shipped on the Colorado Midland RR and unloaded at Colorado Springs to feed and water -- then reloaded for the trip to Denver. When the Colorado Midland couldn't take them in October when we were ready to sell, we sent the cattle in trucks. All of the roads have been improved and shortened and the last several years we have had a loading corral at the Ranch. Now the trip is so much shorter that they do not have to stop and unload to feed them.

I had my first look at the Stockyards in 1954 when Leo took Bob and me to see his cattle. At that time Bob also took me to the House of Representatives where I sat in the Pitkin County seat formerly occupied by



my dad.

For many years when we turned the cattle to graze on the Forest Reserve we had a cowboy who lived in a cabin all summer. He saw that the cattle got salt and stayed away from poisonous plants. We called him the Cow Wadie. Going from the ranch up to the grazing pastures we counted 20 different kinds of wild flowers and found beds of lovely columbines, Colorado's state flower.

I want to tell you about our two interesting experiences in raising potatoes. (We called them spuds.) My dad sent a carload of spuds to Colorado Springs. A man in Aspen made the deal. We knew they were excellent potatoes because they had been inspected when they were loaded. My dad received the pay. One day the Aspen man called Dad and said he had had word that the potatoes were frozen and he wanted a refund. My dad was in town soon after and he went into the office of the man who made the deal. It was about noon and the office was empty. My dad sat down to wait. He noticed a letter on the desk with a heading denoting it was about potatoes so he read it. It was a letter saying the potatoes my dad sent were the best they had ever had. He took the letter. We never heard anything more about that deal.

Years later when Leo planted potatoes he had what seemed to be a good crop. He bought all new machinery for planting, weeding, and digging and built new earth cellars to put the crop in until time to sell. That year the price he received didn't even pay the cost of the hundred pound sacks - nothing for the crop. Leo sold his machinery, leveled out the cellars. That was the last time we had anything to do with spuds.

When Effie and I were ready for college we chose the State Normal School in Greeley, Colo. Leo was in high school there and took violin

lessons from the music teacher at college, J.C. Kendell. Before we left for Greeley, Leo drove four head of cattle to Aspen and sold them. He pinned the money in his shirt pocket. That money took the three of us to Greeley.

While in Greeley, we had an apartment with a wonderful Danish woman. When we showed her a picture of the L with mountains all around she exclaimed, "My goodness, how did you ever get out?"

Our darling mother passed on the summer after our first year in Greeley.

The second year Effie and I went back to Greeley. We had a room at Mary Maroney MacArthur's home -- she had been my mother's closest friend in early days in Aspen. Her brother, Larry Maroney, became a millionaire in Cripple Creek. He used to be a beau of my aunt who went to the Boston Conservatory of Music. My father said that my aunt "went through the forest and picked a crooked stick." She had married a violinist who had played before the King and Queen of England when he was only 15 years old, but he was no good as a husband. We never met him. She left him in the East.

Effie and I had a two year course and graduated with degrees. After my graduation my father took me to the President of the Board of Education in Aspen and told him I was a graduate of the Normal School and would like a job. I got it. My father then said, "You are on your own now," as I was.

Effie kept house for my father and the six younger children. She would have made a wonderful kindergarten or first grade teacher for she knew how to handle children. She was the one who took care of the year old baby when a new one arrived. My youngest sister Mildred called her YiYi.

Effie was a mother to us all, even to me who was a year and a half younger. She made dresses for all four girls, shirts for the boys. It was before we could buy ready-mades. The only training she had was in helping our mother sew. She was a good cook, too. She took advantage on the train that came several years from Colorado Aggie School at Fort Collins. They had a crew to teach cooking, one to help with nursing, one for irrigation helps, rotation of crops, cattle raising, etc. Using a recipe from the Aggies, Effie made a steam-pudding one day for company dinner. Our kitchen in Aspen had a slanted roof and the ceiling was not far above the stove. When she went to serve the dessert, the tin she had steamed the pudding in was nearly empty. She looked up at the ceiling and there it was. We never figured out why that happened but we had a good laugh over it.

Effie was talented. She painted china, painted scenes around our home in watercolors, found new ways to use buttons or braid to decorate our clothing. She even painted the walls in the kitchen at the ranch when they needed it.

Effie made a splendid hostess to all the cattle people who came from Denver or other parts of the West.

The first visitor from a distance that I remember was the man who came out from New York with my father and then went to Alaska. He brought his lovely wife with him. She showed us her jewels which she kept in a bag and hid in her corset. She told us that coming down to the United States from the Klondike there was a terrible storm and they feared the ship would be wrecked. She said she prayed to the Lord to save them and that if she survived she would say the Rosary every day of her life. She said someday she said it twice to she could skip a day.

I also remember a visit from Eugene Grubb, potato king of the West. In her introduction of him, Effie said something about his big feet. She had wit herself.

One Saturday in May, Effie gave a real May Pole party for six couples that had been having parties together for some years. She had fixed a real May Pole -- stringers and all and we had a great time. We had no carpets on the hard-wood floors so we had a real ballroom when we used the front room and dining room together. Many a dance we had just by ourselves.

One game we played in the dining room on a round table with an empty egg (an egg with the insides blown out). One time we played with some friends from Denver, one of whom was a lady who had been given a diamond engagement ring by my father. We chose sides and knelt so our chins were on the table. Then we blew to see which side would blow the egg off first. The father of the young lady had dentures and he blew so hard that they flew across the table. We had a good laugh.

I want to tell you about Babe just after my mother had passed on. Babe used to sit on the tongue of the wagon outside the yard when it was time for Leo to come in from work. Then she would take his hand and tell her troubles if any, to him. He was her confidant.

One year Flexible Flyers were very popular and Babe really hoped she would have one under the Christmas tree. Leo had gone to Aspen shopping and hid the sled in the back of his sleigh. When he came to the corner he threw her sled off so when he came to the gate in the yard she saw no Flexible Flyer. She was truly disappointed. There was much joy the next day when she saw it. She had quite a nice ride from the top of the lane down to the house. She frightened all of the chickens, the cows, and the horses.

Babe was the first in our family to cut her hair, to wear rouge, wear short skirts, etc. She was always ready for anything new -- especially in dancing.

Helen, my other sister, graduated from Colorado Aggies and taught in Trinidad and in Aspen. She and Willard were married at the [L] and spent their honeymoon at Koch's summer place on the Frying Pan River.

As a boy, Willard worked in the Gould and Grover Grocery Store. He became an expert butcher. His father was one of the finest gentlemen I have ever met. He often delivered groceries with a pansy between his lips. Willard had Helen's picture up when he worked at the Midnight Mine. His dad always turned her picture to the wall when they undressed and went to bed. That gives me a laugh even now.

After he and Helen were married, Willard took the four Light girls fishing up to Taylor Lake. He outfitted us all with hip boots, fishing line, and taught us how to put bait on the lines. Effie was the only one who helped clean the fish, though. Delicious rainbow.

I caught the largest fish, but it pulled me into the river so I was wet, really wet. I yelled to Willard, "What shall I do?" He answered, "Wring out your shirt and go on fishing!"

We had tethered the team near our camp where there was grass to eat. I guess we really hobbled the horses, not tethered them, because they were not constrained to any part of the field but they couldn't run because their feet were hobbled. The morning we planned on leaving for home, no horses were in sight. You know who went with Willard to find them -- Effie, of course. She was old man Friday always. The horses weren't hard to catch when they were once located.

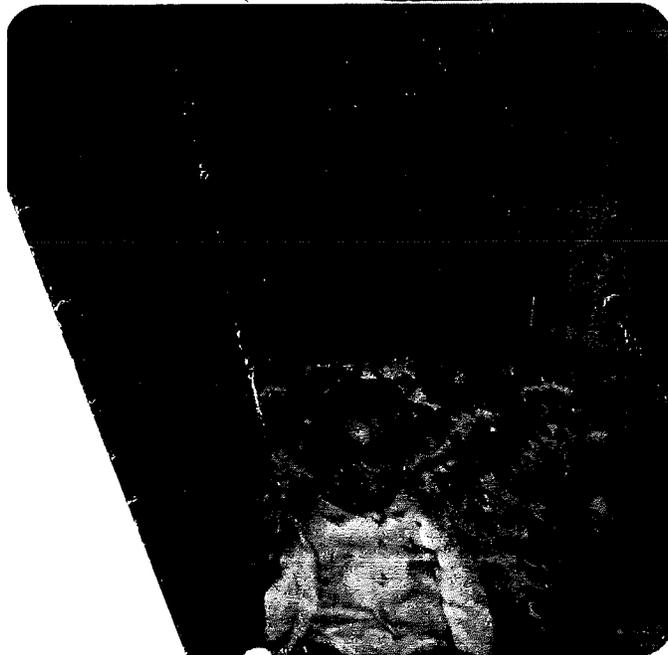
When I took my first trip out of Colorado I went to New York. There,

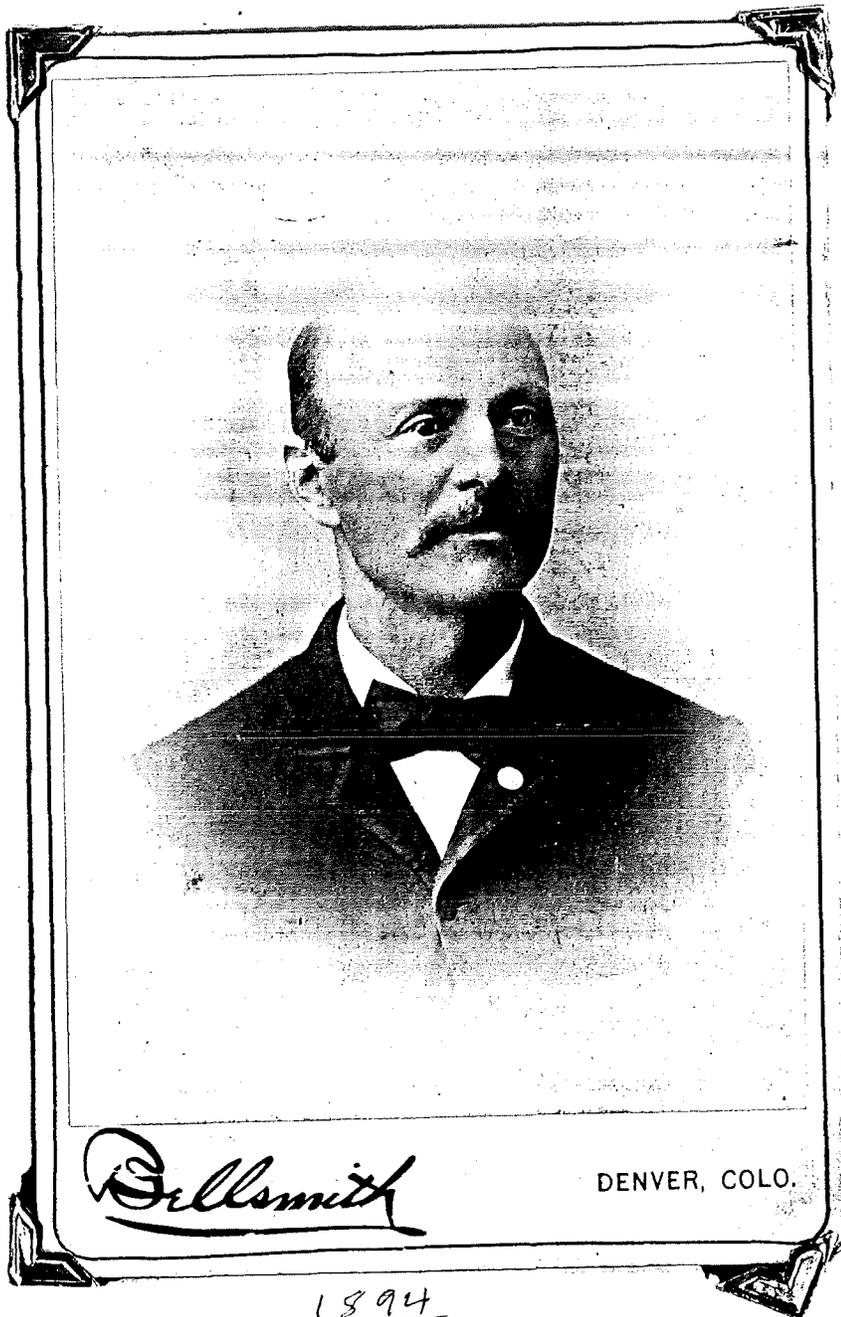
I was asked a lot about the mines, and I had never been in one. So on my return, Willard took me through the Durant Mine. He told me there is a tunnel from the Durant under Aspen to the other side made by mining the vein of ore. He also showed me the big pumps the Smuggler mine had to keep the underground water from flooding the mine.

When Helen, Willard and Patty, their daughter, moved to California, I spent many a summer with them. When they built their house on Marburn I saw the beginnings of a very comfortable, harmonious home.

I am the last leaf on the tree, but there are three more generations following. Here's to the Lights -- all four generations!

*Michael Regan  
5 days old  
and  
Grandparents*

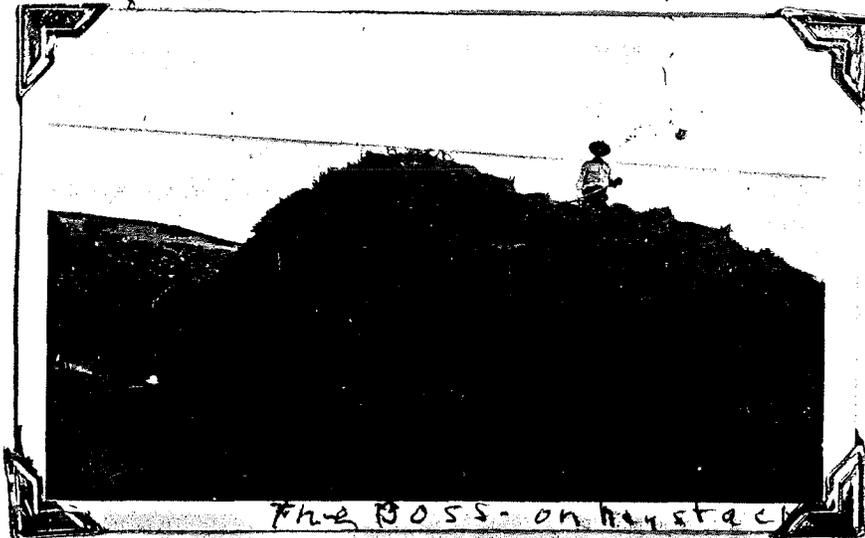




*Bellsmith*

DENVER, COLO.

1894  
Honorable Frederick Light,  
Member of the Colorado House of Representatives.



THE BOSS - ON THE STACK